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A sketch of Chinese citizen's lifelong learning situation

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Abstract

Since 2002, developing a learning society and creating a friendly institutional environment for lifelong learning have been top of national policy-making agenda. This essay first examines the strategic planning, national policies and effectual measures for the comprehensive development of lifelong learning in China. Then with the baseline data of the Chinese Family Panel Studies (CFPS) in 2010, this study investigates the status of Chinese citizens' lifelong learning, including their time allocation, free time activities and the channels of receiving information. Finally, discussion on how to promote lifelong learning is put forward, both at national and individual level.

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1. Introduction

With the focus of more and more governments and related organizations, the concept of lifelong learning has been an important strategic target and guiding theory of formulating education policy and promoting educational reform since its introduction in the sixties of last century. The Chinese government and scholars have accepted the concept of lifelong learning rapidly and expounded it in various relevant government documents. For examples, “To improve the continuing education institution, and build up the lifelong education system step by step” from “Recommendations on The Tenth Five-Year Plan for the National Economy and Social Development” (China's Central Government, 2000a); “Develop remote education and continuing education, gradually construct a society with every citizen committed to learning and pursuing lifelong learning as well” (Hu Jintao, 2007); “By 2020, try to build a learning society that every citizen can learn anytime and anywhere” (China's Central Government, 2010b).

As an important form of life-long learning, continuing education in China has made tremendous developments. The continuing education has been promoted to a relatively independent and irreplaceable level and brought into the education developing strategic target and educational system. Mistaken ideas of continuing education as a supplement to formal education and re-education after university have been corrected. More and more members of society, especially the less-educated workers have been accepted as the object of education, while satisfying the life-long study demands of the society members has been brought into the whole education system.

The concept of lifelong learning is recognized by Chinese Government. Then how great the gap is between

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Chinese Government's strategic goal and the social reality? Which development stage is Chinese society situated on? Answers to these questions depend on empirical evidence. This paper tries to sketch the lifelong learning status of Chinese citizens based on limited data.

2. Continuing Education Scale in China

Table 1 The scale of Chinese continuing education students

		(Unit: Ten Thousand)					
Continuing Education Type	Year						
		1980	1985	2000	2003	2007	2009
Formal Programs	Undergraduates in Adult HEIs	155.4	172.5	353.6	559.2	524.2	541.4
	Employed People Enrolled in Doctoral and Master's Degree Programs				15.0	34.6	39.4
	Web-based Undergraduates				50.1	310.5	417.3
	Students Preparing for Exams Awarding Formal Qualifications				39.4		
	Adult High Schools	75.1	139.0	32.4	21.9	18.1	11.5
	Adult Specialized Secondary Schools	449.4		169.3	105.5	113	161.0
	Total Numbers of Students in Non-formal Programs				5916.8	5807.7	5700.7
Thereinto,							
Training for Qualification Certificates						467.6	518.9
Training for Post Certificates						614.1	606.7
		Year					
Self-study exam graduates		1983-2000 (Total)		2003	2006	2009	
Nonmal course		33.6		33.9	41.2	62.0	
Short-Cycle course		274.0		36.6	27.1	40.3	
Specialized Secondary		40.3		0.002	0	21.7	

Data Source: ①Hao Keming (2009). Pillar of Learning Society: The Development of Continuing Education in China. Beijing: Higher Education Press. ②Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China(2009). Educational Statistics Yearbook of China 2009. Beijing: People's Education Press.

In Table 1, it displays that Chinese continuing education has initially formed a multi-level and multi-type network which also has multiple specifications. Meanwhile, the scale of continuing education, especially the number of students receiving high-level education has expanded a lot in recent years.

The following is to analyze the learning status of Chinese adults based on the data of China Family Panel Study (CFPS) in 2010 from Institute of Social Science Survey, Peking University.

3. Average time spent on the part-time learning and informal education

Table 2 Distribution among different age groups

(Unit: Minute)					
Age group(Year)	Working day	Rest Day	Age group	Working day	Rest Day

(Year)					
16-20	6.7	13.5	51-55	0.4	0.5
21-25	3.5	4.2	56-60	0.2	0.2
26-30	2.4	2.6	61-65	0.4	0.4
31-35	1.1	1.5	66-70	0.8	1.1
36-40	0.9	1.0	Above 70	1.0	0.3
41-45	0.6	0.7			
46-50	0.5	0.6	Total	1.4	2.0

Table 2 depicts that Chinese adults spent quite limited time on the part-time learning and informal education while more time spent on the rest day than working day on average. In addition, elder people spent less time. However, time spent on learning per day increased slightly among sixty years old or more, which may be probably related to the increasing leisure time after retirement.

Table 3 Distribution among different education levels

(Unit: Minute)					
Education level	Working day	Rest Day	Education level	Working day	Rest Day
Illiterate & semiliterate	0.6	0.6	Undergraduate	4.4	5.1
Primary school	0.5	0.7	Master	6.9	6.9
Junior high school	1.4	2.3	Doctor	0.0	0.0
High school	2.7	4.3			
Junior college	5.4	6.7	Total	1.4	2.0

Table 3 reveals that people with higher education spent more time on part-time learning and informal education (except undergraduate). In addition, more time was spent on the rest day than working day for all education levels.

Table 4 Distribution between male and female, city and countryside

(Unit: Minute)					
Gender	Working day	Rest Day	City and Countryside	Working day	Rest Day
Female	1.2	1.7	Countryside	1.1	1.5
Male	1.6	2.3	City	2.0	3.1
Total	1.4	2.0	Total	1.4	2.0

Table 4 demonstrates that male spent more time on part-time learning and informal education than female perday on average while more time on the rest day than working day for both male and female. Meanwhile, people in city spent more time on part-time learning and informal education than in countryside and more time spent on the rest day than working day.

4. Frequency Analysis of Adults' Activities in Leisure Time

Table 5 Frequency analysis of activities in leisure time (%)

Almost	Several times a	Several times	Once a	Once in	Total
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	everyday	week	a month	month	several months	
Watching TV	84.9	11.0	3.3	0.5	0.2	100
Reading	60.1	27.7	9.5	1.8	0.9	100
Body-building	66.1	23.2	8.4	1.5	0.8	100
Tour	0.5	1.2	5.8	14.9	77.6	100
Playing Games	15.0	34.2	35.4	9.2	6.2	100
Eating out	5.7	21.2	44.0	18.7	10.5	100
Doing housework	85.7	9.2	4.1	0.6	0.3	100
Participating in religious activities	27.3	20.2	31.4	7.6	13.5	100

The proportion of reading almost every day was up to 60.1% for the investigated samples.

5. Channels of Receiving Information for Chinese Adults

Table 6 Channels of receiving information for Chinese Adults (%)

	Total	Gender		City and Countryside	
		Male	Female	City	Countryside
Television	44.9	44.9	45.0	42.0	46.4
Internet	8.3	9.4	7.3	14.0	5.6
Newspapers, journals & magazines	11.6	13.4	9.8	20.3	7.5
Broadcast	3.0	3.5	2.5	3.9	2.5
SMS	6.4	6.8	5.9	5.2	7.0
Told by others	24.9	21.4	28.4	14.4	30.0
Others	0.9	0.6	1.2	0.3	1.1
Total	100.0	100	100	100	100

Table 6 manifests that the main channel of receiving information for adults in China was through TV, and the second one was Told by others. Hereby, Newspapers, journals and magazines only accounted for 11.6%. Specifically speaking, for female, TV and Told by others took more percentage than male, while for male, percentages of receiving information from Internet, newspapers, journals and magazines, broadcast, short messages were larger than female. People in countryside received information from TV, Told by others and short messages more than city residents, while Internet, newspapers, journals and magazines, broadcasting were more used by the latter.

Table 7 Channels of receiving information for different education levels

	Illiterate & semiliterate	Primary school	Junior high school	High School	Junior college	Undergraduate	Master	Doctor
Television	47.1	51.3	45.6	39.7	34.1	31.0	28.6	0.0
Internet	0.3	2.7	8.4	16.0	24.6	29.7	30.0	50.0
Newspapers, journals &	1.8	7.3	13.3	19.5	25.3	26.9	24.3	50.0

magazines								
Broadcast	2.2	3.1	3.4	3.2	2.7	2.2	2.9	0.0
SMS	2.0	6.7	9.1	7.7	5.6	4.2	7.1	0.0
Told by others	43.7	28.3	20.0	13.7	7.7	5.9	7.1	0.0
Others	2.7	0.5	0.3	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Table 7 indicates that TV is the main channel to receive information for people with undergraduate and lower education levels, followed by Told by others, newspapers, journals, magazines, and internet. Internet is the main channel for people with master or doctoral degrees, followed by newspapers, journals, magazines and TV. As the education level is rising, the proportion of receiving information for Internet, newspapers, journals and magazines are increasing while that of TV and told by others are decreasing.

6. Discussion

This paper has sketched Chinese residents' lifelong learning status from different aspects based on very limited data. Due to the lack of relevant statistical data in China, it is very difficult to understand lifelong learning status more thoroughly based on solid empirical analysis. But, even so, all available related data states clearly that it is facing many tough challenges to build a lifelong learning society in China. First and foremost, the management system and security mechanism are incapable of keeping up with the lifelong learning development in China. Secondly, the incentive system of lifelong learning has not been well established for members of society. Thirdly, not only the undersupply of lifelong education, but also the quality fails in catering to the development needs of society and learners. In addition, the participation rate of Chinese residents in lifelong learning is comparatively low which has negative influence on the quality of the whole society. Last but not least, the existing educational resources, especially all types of schools, have not been fully utilized.

To construct a lifelong learning society, Chinese government should hammer at something realistic and beneficial instead of announcing attractive government slogans and propaganda. Up to now, the government departments and academics have reached an initial consensus on the following aspects. Firstly, break the separated departments of continuing education management system, insteadly establish an interdepartmental coordination organization in charge of guiding the development of continuing education as a whole, and spur the industrial supervising departments or industrial associations to exert themselves fully in the development of continuing education. Secondly, accelerate the legal construction of continuing education. Thirdly, improve the incentive mechanism of continuing education and encourage individuals to receive various forms of continuing education. Fourthly, support employers to provide continuing education for employees. Lastly, strengthen the supervision and evaluation of continuing education. Fortunately, these policy recommendations have been brought into the National Outline for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development, which providing a prefect opportunity to turn the concept into reality.

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